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ABSTRACT

This publication is comprised of two brief guides, both of which offer strategies, practices, and resources for including students with disabilities in school-to-work systems. The first focuses on how to include students with disabilities in accountability systems. Strategies are offered to help: (1) view standards from the perspectives of all students; (2) build an aligned assessment system that includes all students; (3) create or revise policies on student participation in assessment; (4) provide testing accommodations for students needing them; and (5) report the results to public or legislative audiences. Practices in Kentucky and Maryland are highlighted as exemplary. The second guide focuses on lessons learned from transition systems change. Strategies address commonly identified systems change factors including empowerment of local partnerships, paradigm shifts, state level policies and procedures, formal systems of communication, local service delivery, and student and parent involvement. Briefly described are transition systems change projects in California, Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, and Vermont. (Contains 19 resources.) (DB)

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When All Means All:
How To Include Students with Disabilities in Accountability Systems
[and]
Lessons Learned from Transition Systems Change

School-to-Work Perspectives:
Strategies, Practices and Resources To Include Youth with Disabilities in School-to-Work Systems, Spring-Summer 1997

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School-to-Work Perspectives

Strategies, Practices and Resources to Include Youth with Disabilities in School-to-Work Systems

Spring 1997

When All Means All

How to Include Students with Disabilities in Accountability Systems

Basic skills, thinking skills, personal qualities, job skills, higher standards-these are the words of school-to-work efforts across the nation. States are forging ahead to develop systems where students, regardless of whether they are college bound or heading directly toward employment, are attaining work-related skills before they exit high school. Challenging and relevant academics, as well as meaningful work-based learning experiences in communities, are the glue of school-to-work efforts. Incumbent on schools and school-to-work efforts is the definition of a system of standards toward which students are to progress, and an accountability system for ensuring that progress is being made toward those standards.

One of the shining aspects of school-to-work efforts is that they are for all students. The effort is not targeted toward one group of students. In fact, it is specifically designed to include all students, including students with disabilities. Like other recent legislation (Goals 2000, Improving America's Schools Act), the School-to-Work Opportunities Act specifically notes that students with disabilities (and other traditionally isolated segments of the student population) must be included. This, in turn, means that students with disabilities must be included in the standards and the accountability system that are integral to school-to-work efforts.

But the question remains: How? The unique learning styles and diverse needs of students with disabilities pose challenges for school-to-work efforts. Consideration must be given to how standards, either academic or vocational in focus, can be made applicable to students with special educational needs. Likewise, assessment designed to measure student progress toward these standards must take into account a wide diversity of student abilities. In this fact sheet, we offer five strategies that will help you to:

· View standards from the perspective of all students,

· Build an aligned assessment system that includes all students,

· Create or revise policies on student participation in assessment,

· Provide testing accommodations for students needing them, and

· Report the results to public or legislative audiences.

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Strategies

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1. Keep Standards Broad

Academic content or skills standards should be composed to encompass diverse student abilities and performance. States with the greatest success in applying their educational standards to all students have used standards that are constructed in broad terms, with more detailed specifications outlined in curricular guidelines or frameworks. For example, a standard such as "uses work time efficiently" can be readily applied to virtually all students, including those with very severe disabilities. On the other hand, setting an expectation that all students will "work at a pace equal to or greater than industry standards" may automatically exclude many students from ever reaching the standard. Standards will better serve your efforts when they can be adapted to allow for individualized goals to be established for students of differing abilities.

If you already have your standards in place, however, there are still ways to maximize their relevance to students with disabilities. The first point to

remember is that most students with disabilities should fit within existing standards. Students may need extra supports and specialized instruction, but they should be striving for the same standards as general education students.

2. Think Big When Designing Assessments

Students with disabilities are commonly excluded from assessment programs. This is due to several factors. Many parents and teachers believe that such students have been tested enough through eligibility evaluations and periodic reviews. Others fear the results from these students will "drag down" their school or district performance scores. And many times, testing officials hesitate to adapt the test or testing conditions, in fear of altering the standard conditions under which the test is to be given.

Several of these issues can be resolved by considering students with disabilities in the early stages of test development. Many assessments are tested on populations that do not include students with disabilities. Make sure the items or tasks you are constructing include those in which students with disabilities could readily participate. Keep item difficulty broad so more students can participate. Don't become overly dependent on multiple-choice formats; consider how you might include newer forms of assessment, such as performance assessments, cooperative tasks, or portfolios. Some of these newer forms of assessment promise to be more "user-friendly" for students with disabilities.

It is important to carefully evaluate assessments you might adopt, considering students with disabilities. Similarly, it is important to revise policies to promote participation of students with disabilities in assessments. Specific ways in which to do this are summarized in a recent document produced by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (Elliott, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1996). (See Resources.)

3. Make Sure Policies Get the Point Across

Policies governing which students participate in assessment programs vary greatly among states and school districts. For students with disabilities, these decisions commonly become the responsibility of the parents and professionals who make up the team overseeing the child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These teams base their decisions on guidelines spelled out in school district or state policies. In some cases these policies may suggest exempting students based on the categorical labels assigned to their disabilities, where they receive instruction, or on whether they have had the opportunity to learn the content or skills covered by the test.

We suggest reviewing your current assessment policies to make sure that students with disabilities are

not being readily excluded from school-to-work assessment practices. Make sure students are not being excluded from assessment opportunities solely on the basis of their disability category or their educational setting. If participation is based on exposure to the curriculum or training covered by the test, encourage IEP teams to consider two questions before exempting any student: first, why hasn't the student been afforded the learning opportunities afforded to other students, and second, if the student is in a different curriculum, how will our school or school district remain accountable for his or her progress?

4. Use Accommodations to Level the Playing Field

Measuring the progress of some of your students will be enhanced through the use of testing accommodations, those additional strategies or technologies that are provided to students to compensate for the effect of their disabilities in assessment situations. Common examples include large print or Braille testing booklets for students with visual impairments.

Accommodations can be categorized as belonging to one of four types: (1) presentation (e.g., tape recorded test directions); (2) response (e.g., marking answers directly in test booklet); (3) timing or scheduling (e.g., administering the test over several sessions rather than one lengthy session); or (4) setting (e.g., administering the test to a small group or an individual). Their use is not intended to give unfair advantage to any student, but instead is meant to "level the playing field" for those students whose disabilities may interfere with their ability to demonstrate their true knowledge or skill level. Typically, accommodations chosen for a student should be those already provided in his or her instructional setting.

Accommodation policies differ significantly from state to state, with some policies allowing certain accommodations that others strictly forbid (Elliott, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1996). In many cases, states have disallowed accommodations without knowing whether they have any impact on the validity and reliability of the test. Take time to review your own policies on testing accommodations with the following questions in mind:

· Do testing policies clearly state which accommodations are permitted, and for which assessments?

· Are decisions about testing accommodations being made by those who know the student best, and are these decisions being documented?

· Do policies address the use of all types of accommodations, including those related to presentation, response, timing, and setting?

· Do policies stipulate that accommodations used during assessment be those that are also used during instruction?

· If certain accommodations are currently prohibited, is there adequate research and justification for doing so?

5. Take Roll Call Before Reporting Results

How will you know if your school-to-work efforts are working? The answer depends on your ability to collect valid and reliable information on students' knowledge and skill development. To evaluate how well your overall school-to-work system is serving all students, you will need to rely on strategies of data collection and analysis that include all students.

Unfortunately, approaches to analyzing and reporting assessment results often exclude many students

with disabilities, with exclusion happening at many different stages. In some situations, students with disabilities may be exempted from the testing situation altogether. In other cases, students with disabilities are permitted to participate, but their scores are not aggregated with those of students in general education. Instead, they may be either reported in separate reports or not used at all. With policies differing among schools, districts, and states, comparability of school or district performance becomes problematic whenever the results do not reflect the performance of all students.

Care should be taken when interpreting or reporting the results of any assessment used in your school-to-work efforts. Inquire as to how many students were excluded from participation, and the reasons for these exemptions. Be sure that any report comparing programs, schools, or districts includes information on the numbers of students not included. Ask for performance data to be disaggregated as well, to compare and understand differences between the progress of students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities.

Practices

Two States Where All Means All

When talking about success in building completely inclusive accountability systems, two states are probably mentioned more frequently than any others: Kentucky and Maryland. Both of these states have taken the approach that schools and school districts must account for the success of all their students, and therefore must report on the performance of all students. In fact, each state has adopted the use of an alternative assessment used only with a very small percentage of the students. This alternative assessment ensures that youth with severe disabilities are included in the accountability system. These examples of inclusive accountability systems have significant consequences for schools based on the academic performance of their students, along with other indicators of success, including increased graduation rates and decreased dropout or retention rates.

Kentucky is a recognized leader in the development of student assessment and accountability systems, and has been featured in several national reports as an excellent example of state-level educational reform. The basis for the massive reform found in this state was the Kentucky Educational Reform Act (KERA) of 1990, which led to the virtual rebuilding of the state's entire educational system. As a part of this reform, the Kentucky Instructional Results and Information System (KIRIS) was implemented, a statewide system of assessment and school accountability based on the performance of students. The KIRIS system uses portfolios, performance events, and open-ended questions in the areas of reading, mathematics, science, social studies, and writing at various grade levels. Students deemed incapable of participating in these assessments are expected to participate in the Alternate Portfolio Assessment Program (APAP). These students are generally those who have moderate to severe cognitive disabilities that prevent them from completing a regular course of study even with program modifications. Limits are placed on the number of students that any school can place into this alternative testing program, and scores from students taking the alternate portfolio are weighted equally with those of students participating in the regular assessment. Student performance results are used to construct index scores that measure a school and district's progress. A system of sanctions and rewards has been developed to reward schools that meet or exceed their anticipated progress, and to assist those schools that fall short of their goals.

Maryland is noted for its leadership in using performance assessment as part of a large-scale assessment program. The state also is known for its attention to maintaining psychometric integrity through its publishing of annual reports on school and district performance. Special education has had a major part in the development of the state's assessments, insofar as the state educational agency expects all students to be tested. Because it became concerned about even the limited number of students being exempted, Maryland's Department of Education developed (and is currently field testing) an alternate assessment for students not participating in the regular assessment. This performance-based assessment, called the Independence Mastery Assessment Program (IMAP) measures student progress in independent living

and other functional skill areas.

Resources

The following publications may be helpful in the inclusion of students with disabilities in your system of school-to-work standards or assessments.

Elliott, J. (1996, Dec.). Accounting for students with disabilities. School Administrator, 53 (11), 24-26.

Elliott, J., Thurlow, M., & Ysseldyke, J. (1996). Assessment guidelines that maximize the participation of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments: Characteristics and considerations (Synthesis Report 25). Minneapolis, MN: University of MN, National Center for Educational Outcomes.

Erickson, R. (1997). Questions in an era of accountability. Washington, DC: Federal Resource Center.

Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform. (1996, June). Standards-based school reform and students with disabilities. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform. (1996, September). Standards-based education reform for all students. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Erickson, R., Thurlow, M., & Ysseldyke, J. (1996). Neglected numerators, drifting denominators, and fractured fractions: Determining participation rates for students with disabilities in statewide assessment programs (Synthesis Report 23). Minneapolis, MN: University of MN, National Center for Educational Outcomes.

Shriner, J.G., Ysseldyke, J.E., & Thurlow, M.L. (1994, January). Standards for all American students. Focus on Exceptional Children, 26 (5).

Thurlow, M., Olsen, K., Elliott, J., Ysseldyke, J., Erickson, R., & Ahearn, E. (1996). Alternate assessments for students with disabilities (National Center for Educational Outcomes Policy Directions 5). Minneapolis, MN: University of MN, National Center for Educational Outcomes.

Ysseldyke, J., & Thurlow, M. (1994). Guidelines for inclusion of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments (National Center for Educational Outcomes Policy Directions 1). Minneapolis, MN: University of MN, National Center for Educational Outcomes.

We'd like to thank Ron Erikson, Research Associate and Martha Thurlow, Assistant Director of the National Center for Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota for writing this issue. To contact the authors, call NCEO at (612) 626-1530 or visit their website (click above).

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School-to-Work Perspectives

Strategies, Practices and Resources to Include Youth

with Disabilities in School-to-Work Systems

Summer 1997

Lessons Learned from Transition Systems Change

As we know, hind sight is 20/20. If we had a crystal ball that could tell us the best way to establish a school-to-work system for all students, we probably wouldn't hesitate to use it. The next best thing may be learning what we can from those who have gone before us. Regardless of where our insights come from, resources, strategies, and effective practices can be modified to help with the creation of new systems. This issue of School-to-Work Perspectives shares lessons that have been learned from states implementing Transition Systems Change Projects over the past six years. Ideas about how you can begin to apply these effective practices, strategies, and resources are included to assist with improving your school-to-work system.

In 1991, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) initiated a special grants program. This program made federal funds available to support a series of five-year Transition Systems Change Projects. These projects focus on improving services and supports to ensure successful outcomes from school to adult life for young adults with disabilities. By the fall of 1996, a total of 46 states had been awarded Transition Systems Change grants, 12 of which have recently completed their fifth and final year. The specific goals of these projects are to facilitate within their state the following outcomes:

- Improved support. Access to, availability, and quality of transition assistance for youth with disabilities.
- Improved skills. Ability of parents, advocates, and professionals to assist youth with disabilities to understand and successfully make the transition from school to adult life.
- Improved relationships. Relationships among all who are or should be involved in the transition planning process to provide coordinated, comprehensive transition services that meet the needs of youth with disabilities.
- Improved capacity. Incentives for using expertise and resources available through local programs, projects, and activities involved with transition planning for youth with disabilities.

Strategies

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) identified transition from school to work as one of the major federal priorities of special education programs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA - P.L. 101.476) requires that formal transition planning occur for youth with disabilities at age 16, or earlier if appropriate. To facilitate the implementation of the new transition requirements, Section 626(e) of IDEA authorized a special grants program to make federal funds available to support a series of five year state systems change projects on transition. These state level projects are cooperative efforts, jointly undertaken by

state education and vocational rehabilitation agencies to facilitate change in the service system to ensure the successful transition of youth with disabilities from school to community.

States implementing Transition Systems Change projects have learned valuable lessons when it comes to creating new systems. In the final year of their systems change projects, representatives from 10 states gathered in Washington, D.C. to review their activities and identify factors which had helped them to promote systems change. The factors that were most commonly identified are listed below. Your state might want to consider these as you develop and implement a school-to-work system in your state.

Empowerment of Local Partnerships

· Key stakeholders must be involved in every step of the process from development to implementation to evaluation. Key stakeholders must include students and their families.

· Local teams and partnerships need to be provided with some guidelines regarding partnership structure, goals, expectations for outcomes, best practice information, and assistance with resolving problems.

· Local teams and partnerships must be allowed to struggle with developing their own practices to meet local community needs. Developing local ownership and participating in that process is the glue that bonds members together and establishes long-term commitment toward reaching goals. Flexibility is the key.

· Perception is everything. Although a barrier may actually be at the local level, local partnerships may perceive the barrier as being at the state policy level. Open communication between local, regional, and state levels is essential.

· Financial incentives must be carefully considered. Start-up funding can be helpful to local partnerships, but limits for funding must be made clear and gradual reduction of support for local activities is important. Local partnerships must learn to take ownership and create self-sufficiency for supporting the changes they want to see happen.

· Marketing project activities and team success is important throughout the grant period. A strong message that the grant will end is very important. Teams can then focus their energy on creating momentum for long-lasting change, utilizing and refining existing systems, and promoting sustainability.

Paradigm Shifts

· Ownership at every level is the key to systems change. Long-lasting change is really the result of changing the perspectives of those involved from the old way of thinking to the new.

· Turf issues must be identified and resolved. Use common terms and language, avoid jargon, and demonstrate the benefits of collaboration through reducing duplication and increasing efficiency.

· Involve students and parents in the development of a common vision, regardless of the level of targeted change. Working directly with students and parents throughout the process of change helps to keep the focus on the young adults and their actual needs and reminds us why we are involved.

· Realize that changing attitudes, values, and systems takes time. Events will happen that you did not anticipate and consider reserving some resources to act as reinforcements if needed.

State Level Policies and Procedures

· The experiences of local partnerships during the first few years of the grant should guide changes in policies and procedures. The level where changes are needed should then be agreed and acted upon by all agencies (stakeholders).

· Clarify meaning when using terms such as legislation, policy, and procedures. These terms have different meanings for each person and at different levels.

· Policies, procedures, and legislation should incorporate state agency language and work toward alignment across all agencies at a state and local level.

Formal Systems of Communication

· Remember that within-agency barriers to communication can be just as formidable as across-agency barriers. Establish a regional and local system of communication, use common language that even those not involved in your system will understand, and concentrate on how to share information across systems.

· Clear and open communication with local partners regarding the development, implementation, and impact of activities is essential to successful systems change and should be formalized early.

· The importance of marketing your efforts to the community at large cannot be understated. Go to the press every day/week/month with success stories and updates on your activities.

Local Service Delivery

· Inducements for change have the greatest impact when used to assist changing the local service delivery. Training, materials, resources, stipends, and sub-contracts help to make change happen.

· Cross training and representation of non-traditional partners in the development, implementation, and evaluation of local activities results in more wide-spread change than isolated activities targeted to traditional, segregated groups.

· It is very important to establish that all stakeholders are on a level playing field and that collaborative efforts will benefit all students. Once people believe in and see the benefits of change, they will want to participate.

Student and Parent Involvement

· The involvement of students and parents is essential to systems change and will result in much better service delivery.

· It is important to realize that service providers may feel uncomfortable by empowered students and parents. To help build trust and break down barriers that prevent collaboration, employ flexibly scheduled training that provides consistent information to everyone.

Practices

States that have implemented Transition Systems Change Projects have had much experience when it comes to developing successful strategies and effective practices to make their visions become reality. Project directors share some of their most successful strategies/activities when it comes to effective systems change. These are real life examples of the ideas shared above.

California / Judy Reichle

Since the start of our systems change project, the nine state agency partners that governed it were "equal" and all decisions were made by consensus. This allowed the partners to trust the process and work together differently than they had before. Including families and students as equal partners allowed agencies the opportunity to listen directly to their customer and let their experience guide the change process.

Colorado / Susan McAlonan

We have several strategies which have been effective in creating Transition System Change in Colorado. Several statewide trainings occurred focusing on the IEP and shifting the process to more effectively promote student empowerment and self-determination. The direct education of parents through the NEXT STEPS training workshops facilitated the development of case management skills in families. These workshops are held regionally and are open to parents of children with all types of disabilities, as well as educators and service providers. Local ownership was imperative to the sustainability of change. We facilitated local educational agency and adult service agency ownership through a community needs assessment and action planning based on common outcome indicators. Through the alignment of transition with other educational reform initiatives, we attempted to impact statewide policies to create a more seamless system of services for youth.

Iowa / Roberta Ginavan

We started a train-the-trainer model on self-determination that evolved into a statewide awareness and commitment. Local teams of parents, students, and teachers located across the state were trained on self-determination, and in turn went back to their communities to train others. Simultaneously, the Systems Change Project was inservicing teachers on how to incorporate self-determination within their curriculum. Such interest and excitement arose about this topic that when another project collaborated with the Iowa Systems Change Project to offer Pilot Self-Determination Projects, 14 out of the 15 regions in Iowa requested to participate. What made this truly a success was the use of a top-down, bottom-up approach.

Minnesota / Sandy Thompson

We found that focusing on changing one thing within a system proved more successful than a "shotgun" approach of varying activities which failed to create a lasting impact. One of the main accomplishments of this project was to have Transition Planning incorporated into the states Individualized Education Plan. Strategies successful in obtaining this goal included (a) having a singular goal which everyone understood and could work toward, (b) approaching the goal from multiple levels (e.g., local community to state government) and angles, and (c) training that was student-focused, as opposed to information on how to fill out paper work.

Vermont / William Sugarman

We developed and implemented "Local Core Transition Teams" which consist of educators and adult service providers who come together monthly in their communities to address the needs of students currently preparing to exit school. By meeting monthly, it not only saves time for both groups, but more importantly, the information that is exchanged results in more comprehensive transition services for the students. Referrals occur that may not have necessarily happened previously. Recommendations are made by both groups as to how to provide better services in order to make the transition from school to the adult world as smooth as possible. The success and continuation of these teams are due to the benefits that they create for all parties involved. Student related changes are immediate, time is saved on the part of both the teachers and adult service providers, and teachers are able to make connections and explore options for students who may not traditionally receive adult services.

Resources

Included here is a list of resources that may be helpful to your state with implementing systems change in your school-to-work system.

Charner, I., Fraser, B.S., Hubbard, S., Rogers, A., & Horne, R. (1995). Reforms of the school-to-work transition: Findings, implications, and challenges. Phi Delta Kappan, 77 (1), 40, 58-60.

Jenlink, P. M., Reigeluth, C. M., Carr, A. A., & Nelson, L. M. (1996). An expedition for change: Facilitating the systemic change process in school districts. TECHTRENDS (January/February), 21-30.

McDonnell, L.M., & Elmore, R.F. (1987). Getting the job done: Alternative policy instruments. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 9 (2), 133-152.

Mithaug, D. E. (1994). Equity and excellence in school-to-work transitions of special populations. CenterFocus (6).

National School-to-Work Office. (1995). The school-to-work template. National School-to-Work Office, 400 Virginia Avenue SW, Room 210, Washington, DC 20024, (800) 251-7236.

National School-to-Work Office. (1996). Parent involvement in school-to-work. Resource Bulletin. National School-to-Work Office, 400 Virginia Avenue, SW, Room 210, Washington, DC 20024, (800) 251-7236.

National School-to-Work Office. (1996). Serving youth with disabilities within school-to-work systems. Resource Bulletin. National School-to-Work Office, 400 Virginia Avenue, SW, Room 210, Washington, DC 20024, (800) 251-7236.

Paris, K. A. (1994). A leadership model for planning and implementing change for school to work transition. (Vol. 1). Madison, WI: Center on Education and Work, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Thiers, N. (Ed.). (1995). Successful strategies: Building a school- to-careers system. Alexandria: American Vocational Association.

Tilson, G. P., Luecking, R.G., & Donovan, M.R. (1994). Involving employers in transition: The bridges model. CDEI, 17 (4), 77-89.

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